

HIGH-VALUE HANGS

VERSATILE HARNESSSES FOR EVERY-ROUTE, EVERYDAY USE

MY FRIEND GENE IS A CATALOG-COGITATING, COMPARISON-SHOPPING GEAR GEEK. HE OWNS FOUR HARNESSSES: THE NO-FALLS, LEAST-POSSIBLE-WEIGHT ALPINE RIG; ITS EXACT OPPOSITE, A FULL-BORE BIG-WALL BATMAN BELT; A DRAWS-ONLY SPORT CHASSIS; AND AN ALL-DAY TRAD MODEL. FOR MOST PEOPLE, THOUGH, ONE WILL DO.

BUT, WHICH HARNESS TO CHOOSE IF YOU'RE SHAKEN ON ICE IN WINTER, STIRRED ON ALPINE GRANITE COME SUMMER, AND TAKING OUT SPORT PROJECTS IN BETWEEN? YOU NEED AN ALL-AROUND HARNESS. THEY HAVE EVERY FEATURE YOU CAN THINK OF (AND SOMETIMES MORE): ADJUSTABLE LEG LOOPS, FOUR OR MORE GEAR LOOPS, A HAUL/TAG LINE LOOP, SLOTS FOR ICE-SCREW CLIPS, AND WIDE, BEEFY WAISTBELTS AND LEG LOOPS FOR A COMFY HANG.

This review tests the most full-featured harnesses (short of the full-on wall-haulers) from 11 manufacturers, grading them on safety, comfort/support, versatility, and fit.

Overall, all-around harnesses continue to become safer and safer (partly due to advances in technology, and partly due to the seven harness-related lawsuits currently pending). All models reviewed have reinforced waist and leg tie-ins – a harness's area of highest wear and tear. And, one has a plastic wear-protector (Mammut), while another (Wild Country) uses bright red webbing as a wear indicator. Several companies use impossible-to-screw-up, pre-threaded buckles (some are even releasable for easy on-and-off over boots and/or crampons). Eight of these offerings include two waist buckles, ensuring a centered tie-in and belay loop throughout the size range and over bulky winter layers. Two of the designs (Mammut and Petzl) feature edge-load construction, which distributes the force across the full width of the waistbelt and/or leg loop, allowing increased comfort, breathability, and support. Three of the harnesses have molded gear loops, but most keep it traditional with a much stronger and safer design that uses tubing sheathed over nylon webbing (Metolius' loops being the strongest and safest).



BLACK DIAMOND FOCUS SPEED

\$75, 17.5oz; bdel.com

- Safety Features: ●●●○
- Comfort/Support: ●●●○
- Versatility: ●●●○
- Fit: ●●●○

OVERALL GRADE: B-

Like other pre-threaded buckles,



BD's Speed design features two metal plates laid over each other so as to lock the webbing in place under load. The Speed buckle's grab tab, sewn around both plates, allowed easy loosening

– for size adjustment or removal – even with gloves on. The fact that it could not be unthreaded, though, was a major blow to its versatility; the two plates are sewn together too tightly to do so, which made donning the Focus Speed over boots and crampons a tenuous balancing act. For rock climbing, however, the Focus Speed's light weight, bartacked haul loop, and strong gear loops excelled.

CAMP QUARTZ CR

\$70, 17oz; camp-usa.com

- Safety Features: ●●●○
- Comfort/Support: ●●●○
- Versatility: ●●●○
- Fit: ●●●○

OVERALL GRADE: B

CAMP's flagship Quartz CR harness, with its proprietary Sicura buckle, wowed testers with its ease of entry; it fastens around the legs and waist, rather than your having to step into it, making the Quartz CR one of the best-fitting and most versatile harnesses

reviewed. CAMP's gear loops – a pliable, tactile rubber threaded over nylon webbing – helped keep gear in line on the hip and held up strongly during pull-testing. This, combined with the 12kN haul loop and CAMP's patented No-Twist belay loop – featuring a sewn-in carabiner slot on its front side to prevent cross-loading of the belay biner – led this harness to solid marks for safety. The Quartz CR's airmesh-covered, foam-lined waist and leg cushioning was plush and breathable, yet we found this composition to be less supportive than some – especially in the legs, which

are narrower at the back. Two additional features round out the Quartz CR: First, the waistbelt includes twin ice-clip slots sewn between the front and rear gear loops. Second, the snag-free, adjustable riser straps are buckle free and completely removable for bivies.



MAD ROCK SATURN PSI

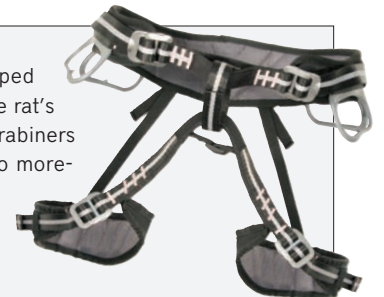
\$55, 18.7oz; madrockclimbing.com
(similar model available for women)

- Safety Features: ●●●○○
- Comfort/Support: ●●●○○
- Versatility: ●●●○○
- Fit: ●●●○○

OVERALL GRADE: C+

Mad Rock's innovative and affordable (and at \$55, one of the cheapest reviewed) Saturn PSI harness features gas-impregnated foam bubbles lining the waistbelt, giving it firm, solid support. Four prethreaded buckles allow entry and size adjustment, and can be completely unbuckled as needed. Where the Saturn PSI fell short was with its molded-plastic gear loops. The easy-clipping, inclined, and

notched design helped prevent the rat's nest of carabiners common to more-traditional loops, but were prone to tearing under load, due to being stitched through the plastic into the waistbelt – the stitching literally rips through the material. Loaded with the maximum-rated weight of 5kg (11lb, roughly equivalent to a triple rack to 4"), the loops held during numerous test falls. However, they showed signs of strain, and ripped out easily under a static pull.



MAMMUT BAFFIN

\$60, 18.2oz; mammutusa.com

- Safety Features: ●●●○○
- Comfort/Support: ●●●○○
- Versatility: ●●●○○
- Fit: ●●●○○

OVERALL GRADE: B+

The aptly named Baffin, Swiss-made



Mammut's do-everything harness, offers a high degree of usability and comfort. Full-strength Edge-Tape distributes

the load across the entire width of the waistbelt, resulting in excellent comfort. We also loved the ease of entry allowed by Mammut's patented Click buckles – no more playing Twister to don your harness, even over skis or crampons. We did find that these buckles could loosen slightly over the course of a day's cragging, though. The Baffin's gear loops, a combination of molded plastic and stiffened webbing, were fast-food easy to clip, with their stand-out profile. However, the molded plastic design showed significant strain after a few soft pull-tests, and the tag-line loop at the back is attached solely with a single bartack. We were impressed, though, by Mammut's patent-pending composite tie-in protector, which eliminated wear on the leg loops – usually the first place to wear out on any harness.

METOLIUS SAFE TECH DELUXE

\$95, 18.3oz; metoliusclimbing.com
(women's version available)

- Safety Features: ●●●●●
- Comfort/Support: ●●●○○
- Versatility: ●●●○○
- Fit: ●●●●●

OVERALL GRADE: A-

Metolius makes the safest, most durable harnesses on the market, as exemplified by the Safe Tech Deluxe model. From its 10kN-rated gear loops, to the full-strength, 16kN rear haul loop, to its Ballistics nylon waistbelt sheath, the Safe Tech Deluxe withstood all abuse. Additionally, it was the only harness reviewed that offered *separate* adjustments of both the rise and the legs, making the Safe Tech Deluxe the best-fitting harness tested. All this durability, safety, and adjustability does come at a cost: The main waistbelt buckle was

the most difficult to tighten, especially with gloves on. Much of the other Safe Tech technology builds on the primary webbing running the length of the waistbelt – allowing the gear and haul loops to be bartacked into the main chassis. Unfortunately, this makes the harness less comfortable than many – the surrounding areas of foam and nylon folded over the primary webbing during hanging belays, leaving testers a little sore. As an all-around cragging harness, though, the made-in-USA Safe Tech Deluxe was the strongest and safest reviewed, and will hold up through years of heavy use.



MISTY MOUNTAIN CADILLAC
\$95, 18.4oz; mistymountain.com

- Safety Features: ●●●●○
- Comfort/Support: ●●●●○
- Versatility: ●●●●○
- Fit: ●●●●○

OVERALL GRADE: B+



Typical of USA-made Misty Mountain climbing gear, the Cadillac is a stout, well-built harness. Offering four inches of support at the waist, and three at the leg, the Cadillac lives up to

its namesake, with a plush, supportive ride – although not quite as nice for long belays as others reviewed. Its thread-back buckles were easier than some to adjust, but took longer and required more dexterity – especially with gloves on – than a pre-threaded buckle. The Cadillac’s six gear loops, including four of the upturned, easy-clip variety, are made from 4mm cord covered with plastic tubing, then bartacked directly into the primary webbing, preventing any sort of strain or premature wear. Other details include an industrial-strength haul loop for the tag/haul line, and clean, seatbelt-webbing tail keepers at the hips. In general, we liked the Cadillac for rock, but found it lacking for winter warfare.

PETZL CORAX
\$80, 18oz; petzl.com
 (similar model available for women)

- Safety Features: ●●●●○
- Comfort/Support: ●●●●○
- Versatility: ●●●●○
- Fit: ●●●●○

OVERALL GRADE: A

Petzl has historically led the charge with innovation and comfort in harnesses, and the newly remodeled, French-made Corax is no exception. The Corax features Frame Construction, which forces the load of a fall around the outer webbing of the belt. This, combined with Petzl’s highly breathable perforated foam liner, yielded one of the most comfortable, supportive harnesses of the review. The Corax’s top-flight gear loops – featuring rigid, inclined, molded plastic covered with nylon webbing – lay flat when empty, but

accommodated large amounts of gear as needed. A commendable new safety feature also defines the Corax: a bright-green belay loop printed with instructional graphics indicating safe tie-in and belay clip-in points. The patented pre-threaded buckles – a Petzl advent now 11 years old – were easy to adjust, did not creep, and were completely releasable for donning the harness over skis or ice boots, although not as easily as some reviewed. Another nod to winter use are the twin slots built into the webbing, accommodating Petzl’s Caritool ice-screw-racking accessory.



SINGING ROCK ALLROUTE
\$60, 19.8oz; libertymountain.com

- Safety Features: ●●●●○
- Comfort/Support: ●●●●○
- Versatility: ●●●●○
- Fit: ●●●●○

OVERALL GRADE: C

Singing Rock’s Allroute harness, with its proprietary Rock&Lock buckle system, offered excellent adjustability, without loosening. The



buckle’s hooked upper plate, unique to this design, allowed easy unbuckling of either leg loops or waistbelt (you simply slip the bight

of webbing over the hook), resulting in the Allroute’s high degree of versatility and ease of entry. The gear loops were durable and well-made, although slightly more difficult to clip than the others reviewed due to their softness, which also contributed to gear becoming tangled on the harness. Safety features were disappointing, consisting only of minor reinforcement at the waist and leg tie-in points. In terms of comfort, the Allroute went lacking: The harness’s simple construction, which consists of 1”-wide webbing over a foam waistbelt, provided noticeably less support than all others reviewed. Finally, with the Allroute’s ease of entry and double-front buckles, one would ideally like to use this harness for winter climbs, but its lack of any accessory loops meant that screws had to be racked on the gear loops, rather than on a convenient racking biner.

NEED TO KNOW | The 411 on harness wear and tear

RETIREMENT TIME ▶ The belay loop and waist and leg tie-in points are the strongest parts of your harness, designed expressly to withstand worst-case-scenario, Factor Two falls. You should follow manufacturers' recommendations by belaying and rappelling off the belay loop, and by threading the

rope through the sewn tie-ins on the waist and legs. But, as strong as they are initially, these areas do eventually wear out. Buy a harness with reinforced strong-points, *examine it regularly*, and retire it immediately when you notice ragged or worn webbing at *any* of these areas.

TRANGO DIAMOND \$50, 17.5oz; trango.com (women's version available)

- Safety Features: ●●●●○
- Comfort/Support: ●●●●○
- Versatility: ●●●●○
- Fit: ●●●●○

OVERALL GRADE: C

Trango's lowest-priced-in-review Diamond provided good comfort and support, due to its thick, wide waistbelt and leg loop construction. Its ergonomic threadback buckle, while not as easy to adjust as pre-threaded models, allowed reasonably facile entry and fit. Similarly, the leg loops tightened easily and stayed put, unlike some of their pre-threaded competitors. Extra safety features consisted of reinforced waist and leg strong-points, and a bright-red bartack marking the recommended-minimum 4" tail length.

Constructed of molded rubber and notched for organizational facility, the Diamond's new-school gear loops were easy to clip and kept gear in order.



However, on multiple occasions during lab testing, they ripped out under minimal force. (Trango told *Climbing* that the gear loops have been beefed up for future production, and that they have received no reports of failure in the field.) Where the Diamond disappointed was in its versatility – with a single-buckle waist, no accessory loops, and faulty gear loops, it was relegated to recreational use only.

WILD COUNTRY SYNCRO \$60, 22.2oz; wildcountry.co.uk

- Safety Features: ●●●●○
- Comfort/Support: ●●●●●
- Versatility: ●●●●○
- Fit: ●●●●○

OVERALL GRADE: B+



A full 4" at its widest, the Syncro uses a double layer of padding to support the lumbar region for long belays and rappels.

The tapered leg-loop design also added support to the rear of the leg, without bulk at the front. Patented Ziplock buckles allowed easy fitting, and unthreaded completely to go over bulky winter gear. Wild Country's red webbing wear-indicators, located at the waist and leg tie-in points, add an extra margin of safety in those critical high-wear areas by offering a highly visual reminder once retirement time arrives. In addition, its bartacked gear loops, three 10kN-rated accessory loops, and a haul loop of the same strength lent the Syncro very good marks for safety. Its versatility was somewhat lacking, though, with the bulk and weight almost imparting big-wall stiffness – a bit much for general rock cragging.

NEED TO KNOW | Used right, your harness will save your ass for years.

HAUL AWAY ▶ Full-strength haul loops can withstand 16kN, or 3,500lbs – the same load as the belay loop. This is key for multi-pitch climbing, where the loop will be responsible for a tag line, descent shoes, extra gear, etc., and must withstand the abuse of chimneys, offwidths, and the like. But, just because it's as strong doesn't mean you should use it in the same way as the belay loop: Never rappel from the haul loop, and never anchor in with it, either.

SIZING ▶ Size your harness to ensure the waistbelt rides on your *waist* and that it covers the entire circumference of your hipbones. Leg loops should be snug, but not tight. The rise – that stretch of webbing between the waist and legs – should allow you to reach for faraway holds without causing the waistbelt to ride up, and should channel your weight mostly onto the leg loops.

YATES ASTROMAN

\$115, 22.2oz; yatesgear.com

- Safety Features: ●●●●○
- Comfort/Support: ●●●●○
- Versatility: ●●●●○
- Fit: ●●●●○

OVERALL GRADE: B-

The beefiest harness in this review, the Astroman, USA-made by Yates Gear, was one of the most durable models tested, achieving high marks for safety. Its thick, wide waistbelt and leg loops are made with 1" webbing backed by cushy, long-lasting Hypurcel foam – the same stuff used in orthotic insoles for foot-pounding arch support. Leg loops were not as wide as others, however, and the Astroman's overall bulk meant it was less comfortable for certain testers. Seven gear loops, including one upturned, easy-clip version on the right side, are bartacked into the primary waist webbing – yielding infinite racking capacity – and the haul loop is



rated to 15.5kN. Yates' SAFELock double-pass buckle, with its offset, color-coded plates, was easy to manipulate and showed zero size-creep over time. Overall, we found the Astroman to be less versatile than some, although an extremely well-made harness, ideal for fast climbing on walls or long trad routes, where its bulk and heft translate into day-after-day support and year-after-year durability.

Use it wrong and you might as well not have one.

GEAR LOOPS ▶ One manufacturer in this review (Metolius) makes their gear loops so strong that they can even withstand accidental shock-loading. While this may seem like overkill, imagine being high up on a multi-pitch route when a gear loop breaks, spilling half your rack, possibly injuring your partner, and certainly SNAFU'ing the rest of the climb, if not turning it into a full-blown epic. The lesson: Make sure your gear loops are strong enough to resist breaking.